DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 558 CS 215 817

AUTHOR Delanoy, Mary
TITLE Teaching Philosophical Thinking through Children's Literature: Creative Applications of Dialogue and Story.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Literature; Core Curriculum; *Critical Thinking; Didacticism; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Learning Strategies; *Philosophy; *Student Development; Teaching Methods; *Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS Philosophical Influences; *Reading Thinking Relationship

ABSTRACT

Teaching reasoning and judgment to children under the auspices of philosophy is an idea that has emerged recently in the modern era. It is theorized that, through practice in logic and ethics, children will begin to apply reasoning skills to their own life situations, think for themselves, and become better critical thinkers, all in a context that is natural and uncontrived. Much of the literature associated with philosophy for children comes from the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. Established in 1969, the Institute provides materials to educators to aid in the integration of philosophy into the core curriculum. Some of the materials from the institute are works of literature created solely to teach children the skills of philosophical thought. Although such didactic literature is useful, literature for children as a whole is rich in philosophy and much more can come from looking at books and stories in a philosophical context. It is further conjectured that a shift in thinking is necessary for educators to embrace stories differently and do philosophy with children experientially as a result. Such a shift will enhance the child's ability to think critically and grow philosophically through books. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

CS

ED 410 558

Teaching Philosopical Thinking Through Children's Literature: Creative Applications of Dialogue and Story

Mary Delanoy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Delanoy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS215817

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Teaching reasoning and judgment to children under the auspices of philosophy is an idea that has emerged recently in our modern era. Through practice in logic and ethics, children, it is theorized, will begin to; apply reasoning skills to their own life situations, think for themselves, and become better critical thinkers, all in a context that is natural and uncontrived. Much of the literature associated with philosophy for children comes from The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. Established in 1969, the Institute provides materials to educators to aid in the integration of philosophy into core curriculum. Some of the material from the institute are works of literature created solely to teach children the skills of philosophical thought. It is this paper's premise that, while such didactic literature is useful, literature for children as a whole is rich in philosophy and much more can come from looking at books and stories in a philosophical context. It is further conjectured that a shift in thinking is necessary for educators to embrace stories differently and do philosophy with children experientially as a result. It is this author's view that such a shift will enhance the child's ability to think critically and grow philosophically through books.

Teaching Philosophical Thinking Through Children's Literature: Creative Applications of Dialogue and Story

Philosophy for Children. The notion in itself quickly conjures up an array of contrasting images. The bright and lively world of the child in direct opposition with the gray and formal world of the philosopher. Yet, there exists those intersections that reveal philosophy as a viable and critical subject for a young person's intellectual diet. Lipman (1996) suggests that children need and want philosophy in their lives as evidenced by their continuously asking why?

With respect to children's literature in relation to the teaching of philosophy, immediate apprehension may occur. For many, literature exists only on the aesthetic plane and any attempt to use it for some other intent is suspect. Literature especially written for children has been fiercely guarded throughout the 20th century due to the early misuse of books solely to teach moralistic lessons. Textbooks, bookish in form but didactic in their nature, have been developed over the years to fill the gap between story and lesson. Few dichotomies have such clearly defined criteria that separate them as literature and textbooks yet over and over again children are offered compromises between the two. The whole language movement in publishing is but one example. In terms of philosophical content it is almost needless to say that many books are available that are philosophical in their intent from the start. Readers can not help to scratch their heads in philosophical wonder over the adventures of Le Petit Prince (The Little Prince). Such a book is

obvious in its content, but what of the vast array of other literary works that fill our libraries; the legends and tales that play out in our minds the values of our culture and other cultures, the poetry that heralds the yearnings that are intrinsic to our humanistic spirit? It is this writer's contention to teach philosophy through those literary corridors; to allow the intersection of the roads of wonder, creativity, story, and play to foster philosophical thought through dynamic and provocative dialogue between teachers and children.

Lyman and Rogers-Newman (1996) suggest that a philosophical quest is a search for wisdom and truth. The student of philosophy experiences life and uses it to create principles that help them solve problems and make decisions. They go on to relate that the experiences vicariously appreciated by literature can foster philosophical thinking in a child's own search for wisdom. As with most educational inquiry, the Lyman/Rogers-Newman study focuses on the methodology possible to facilitate children in reaching possible goals. They utilized what they called a "thinktrix matrix." The matrix is a structured cognitive response to books that helps provide insightful inquiry as to their content. Through a system of thinking types (recall, cause and effect, similarity, differences, idea to example, example to idea, and evaluation) and focal points (character, event, feeling/trait/theme, story, setting, problem/conflict, author's style, and relationship) children discuss and write about the relevance of a piece of literature to their own experience. It is hoped that if students have a system of thinking, and problematic, relevant literature to respond to, that they will be more likely to look at life in a philosophical way. It is at this point than that the question emerges; just what

is philosophical thinking?

Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980) suggest that, as adult, we have learned to except the every day perplexities that permeate our lives and take them for granted. Unlike children, we stop wondering about why things are the way they are. We accept life as enigmatic and puzzling because it's just the way it is. Children, on the other hand, are continually in a condition of wonder. In many ways philosophical thinking, thinking that ponders life's perplexities, is the very style of thought that children are engaged in throughout the whole of their formative years. The essence of this idea forms the foundation of an important intersection between philosophical thought and children's literature.

Throughout the whole of children's literature the most prevailing theme is the question of why things are the way they are. Chapter one of Winnie the Pooh by Milne begins this way;

> Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it. And then he feels that perhaps there isn't. Anyhow, here he is at the bottom, and ready to be introduced to you. Winnie-the-Pooh.

While the characters of Christopher Robin or Winnie-the-Pooh don't spend much time on the complexities of this ponderable situation, never-the-less, there is a philosophical dilemma presented that is only the first of many that

Milne's character's become involved with.

Such is the framework for much of the literary works enjoyed by children of all ages. The extended goodnight of the little rabbit in Goodnight Moon by Brown is a mirror on the questions of loyalty and trust. Sendak's character of Max and his journey into another reality of wild things, in Where the Wild Things Are, examines love and power. Even the enigmatic questions of time and space and the possibilities that exist in the tesseract emerge in L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time. These are only four of the rich spring-boards of philosophical thought that populate children's literature. Upon examination it is evident that the material is there; that new material need not be written solely to fill a void. But, how does a teacher teach philosophy through such books? How are the connections made?

Previously mentioned is the methodological approach of the thinktrix matrix. Lyman (1996) suggests that while discussing the theme of The Giver, written by Lowry, students began to think at a higher level of abstraction and developed relationships between structured knowledge and specific events and characters. This writer acknowledges the validity of this approach but questions the necessity. So to are Lipman's novels, written specifically to teach philosophy, but beg the question of necessity. Lipman, it should be noted is the Director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children and author of many of the fictional novels written specifically to teach the ideas of logic, reasoning and ethics. Lipman (1996) expresses an interest to encourage children's book authors to write educational narratives that can function both as texts and literature; in other words, books that teach

but also fit the aesthetic criteria associated with works of art.

A novel such as the acclaimed Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy , written by Gaarder, is just such a book, attempting to bridge this hypothetical gap between literature and educational materials. Of the novel, Olsen (1996) expresses a limitation to the understanding of the work without suitable prior knowledge. By prior knowledge Olsen is referring to Kant's philosophy, particular knowledge in the body of philosophical works. Before utilizing Sophie's World Olsen taught seminars on doing philosophy with children. His concerns were to teach educators how to aid students in increasing their self confidence, independence, and their ability to think and criticize.

This writer argues that specific knowledge is subordinate to the greater attributes of philosophical inquiry; divergent thinking, critical thinking, logic, and other cognitive strategies. These attributes, while they move towards philosophy, intersect with the more aesthetic qualities of literature and those of creativity. Perhaps another approach, one that relies and expands on the essence of literature as an aesthetic discipline and couples philosophy with those elements relevant to creativity, exists.

As Greene writes (as cited in Polakow, 1993); "It is the engagement with art and literature that empower us to move beyond ourselves, enabling us to read the world and stirring us to 'wide-awakeness'." In reading the world, one understands the child as an intentional meaning-maker, an individual who creates relationships between themselves and the world. Around the turn of the century, Lady Victoria Welby published What is Meaning? laying out

three main level of meaning; sense, meaning, and significance. Welby urged that "priority be given to logic–the ethics of language, and that logic should constitute the 'basis or core of any good education'" (Lipman, 1993, p. 170). Through logic, it can be argued, a child can create meaning. Further, it is through the inherent logic of a realized art form that meaning is derived. This is to say that literature, in its purely aesthetic form, can provide children with the raw logical stimulus to form philosophical conclusions about the world around them. Most writers have already synthesized philosophical intent within the literary content of their work. Gardner (1993, p. 237) writes of the great poet T. S. Eliot; "the Eliot voice combined the philosophical and the prosaic; he was able to deal with philosophical themes that engaged him while wrapping them in the language and imagery of ordinary life." Indeed, it is this writer's contention that writer's for children do just that as a matter of course. For children's literature must be, by its nature, clearly understood and identifiable; it must relate to and embody the human condition in such a way as to be readily accessible to a young person.

While it may be enough simply to activate philosophical thinking through the reading of good children's literature one more aspect of the process might enliven and clarify the child's grasp of the particular concepts involved. It is vitally important for educators to engage in meaningful dialogue with children concerning the books they are reading.

Matthews, in his book Dialogues With Children (1984), utilizes Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad Together to demonstrate how dialogue can enhance a child's experience of literature and philosophy. Matthews begins by sharing a

story in which Frog and Toad discuss how characters in a book they are reading are brave because they fight dragons and giants. The two then ask the question; "I wonder if we are brave?"Matthews goes on to relate the rest of the story of how the two friends go out and attempt to be brave. He then relates the dialogue he shared with the children who ranged in age from eight to eleven;

> Among the children of my class . . . "Dragons and Giants" was an instant success. I suggested that the story raised a question about what bravery is, and we talked a little about how it did this. Then I asked the children to tell me what is required for someone to be brave.
>
> They told me that to be brave one must do something that is 1) dangerous but 2) not stupid. I suggested that someone who did something stupidly dangerous might be said to be "foolhardy." They seemed to not have the word, though they had the idea. The deed required for bravery, they went on, must be performed 3) for an important reason and 4) not for a reward, though 5) a reward might result. Finally, they were all agreed that 6) whether one is scared or not is simply irrelevant to the question of bravery (Matthews, 1984, p. 21-22).

The six points that the children came up with flowed easily and directly from them with little assistance from Matthews. While the list does not constitute a complete philosophical thesis of bravery, the children were able to develop a concept of bravery in a logical format from a literary source. There was a

lively exchange of ideas and the list of attributes is one that most could agree on. This writer was impressed by this dialogue and sees it as a beneficial conclusion to any literary experience.

While there is debate over the manner in which we might teach our children philosophy, whether or not our children need or want philosophy, or arguments over the educational applications of purely aesthetic art forms such as literature, two points are clear; that philosophical thinking has its roots in the passionate dialogue that results from engaging and provocative writing, and, that children by their nature are natural philosophers, equipped to wonder about the complexities of life with joy and abandonment. It is through philosophy, the skills of philosophical thought, that the inroads towards higher critical thinking and creativity are traveled. Perhaps it is through their literature that children will travel the high roads.

Reference List

Brown, Margaret W. (1947). Goodnight moon. New York: Harper & Row.

Gaarder, J. (1991). Sophie's world; A novel about the history of philosophy. Oslo: H. Aschehoug.

Gardner, H. (1993). Creating minds; An anatomy of creativity through the lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi. New York: Basic Books.

L'Engle, M. (1962). A wrinkle in time. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Lipman, M. (Ed.). (1993). Thinking children and education. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendal/Hunt.

Lipman, M. (1996). On writing philosophical literature for children. Bookbird, 34 (3), 6-11.

Lipman, M., Sharp, A. M., & Oscanyan, F. S. (1980). Philosophy in the classroom (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lowry, L. (1993). The giver. New York: Laurel-Leaf Books.

Lyman, F. (1996). Building philosophical foundations; The thinktrix model in the classroom. Bookbird, 34 (3), 17-21.

Matthews, G. B. (1984). Dialogues with children. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

Milne, A. A. (1926). Winnie the pooh. New York: Dutton.

Olsen, P. (1996). Sophie's World; A pathway to philosophy for children. Bookbird, 34 (3), 12-16.

Polakow, V. (1993). On being a meaning-maker: Young children's experiences of reading. In M. Lipman (Ed.) Thinking children and education (pp. 204-212). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendal/Hunt.

Sendak, M. (1963). Where the wild things are. New York: Harper & Row.